We took the temperature of Oregon business this year, working on 140 cases for small, for-profit businesses with 100 or fewer employees. Businesses brought forward a wide range of concerns, including countless requests for help finding information and problems with licensing, procurement, taxes and policy implementation.

Looking Forward

Improve Communication and Customer Service

Based on the concerns brought forward by Oregon small businesses in 2014, there are some clear opportunities. State government can improve its relationship with small business by improving pathways for communication. Agencies that intentionally communicate with clarity and respect will find a better reception among the small businesses they regulate.

Dave wanted to start a trucking school, but spent seven months working through a slow licensing process with an office of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. The Small Business Advocate worked with the agency to highlight process improvements for the licensing office and the small business. The agency’s new management worked with their stakeholder group to implement changes. Dave got his license, and school is now in session.

Eleven percent of total cases are related to business and payroll taxes, while approximately 5 percent of total cases represent problems small business have with state procurement.

Lilia sells B20 biodiesel fuel and was concerned by the amount of paperwork required by the Oregon Department of Transportation. The Small Business Advocate worked with ODOT to raise awareness of the issue. ODOT worked with fuel sellers to quickly develop and implement a streamlined reporting process. Lilia and all B20 biodiesel fuel sellers in Oregon are saving thousands of dollars in labor under the new system, which still provides ODOT with the information they need to report to the Legislature.

Five percent of cases involve policy implementation issues that have a negative effect on businesses.

Devin had contracts with a state-funded council to provide communications planning and marketing services but wasn’t getting paid on time. The Small Business Advocate worked with the Department of Human Services to get him paid right away and to set up ongoing electronic fund transfers. The council implemented protocols to improve the timeliness and clarity of their communications with vendors and DHS.

Donna applied for an in-home care agency license from the Oregon Health Authority. She waited eight months for an answer, before finally contacting her legislators. Her inquiry was referred to the Small Business Advocate, who worked with OHA staff to identify opportunities to improve the licensing process. Donna received her comprehensive license, and the agency established clear steps and staff response timelines to speed up the process while maintaining its rigor.

About 17 percent of cases were referred to Small Business Development Centers or other levels of government.

Taking a look at the remainder, licensing and certification issues represent 34 percent of all cases – the largest and most challenging trend.